

Black bear baiting on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

by Chris Johnson

Black bear baiting season will begin on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and it's time to review the rules and regs of this annual hunt.

Black bear baiting is allowed on the Refuge by special use permit only. Brown or grizzly bears are illegal to take over bait at any time.

The part of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge that is open to black bear baiting is basically the area of the Refuge west of Swanson River Road and north of Swan Lake Road. A large map depicting the open area can be viewed at the Refuge Headquarters located on Skihill Road in Soldotna.

Permits are issued on a first-come first-serve basis. It's not uncommon to have perspective permittees camped out in the Headquarters parking lot waiting to pick up a Black Bear Baiting Permit when the Refuge opens for business at 8 a.m. on the first day permits are issued. This year the Refuge started issuing permits last Monday, April 16th.

Each Refuge Black Bear Baiting Permit is issued for an exclusive one-square mile section. Hunters can only maintain two active bait stations simultaneously, whether on or off the Refuge. Multiple hunters are allowed under each permit but only hunters listed on the permit and that have a signed permit in their possession may use the Black Bear bait station.

What do hunters need in order to get a Black Bear Baiting Permit? Perspective permittees need to have a valid State of Alaska hunting license and be at least 16 years of age, and they must have completed an ADF&G-approved Bear Baiting clinic. The clinic needs only to be done once in a lifetime, and ADF&G issues a certificate or bear baiting card to the attendee.

The permittee needs to be in good standing on past Refuge Black Bear Baiting Permits. This means past permittees who did not turn in their harvest report to the Refuge before September 30 of the last permit year, or who turned their harvest reports in late two years in a row will not be issued permits for one year.

Permittees also need to register their black bear baiting station with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. This can be done at the Refuge headquarters when you pick up your Refuge permit or at any ADF&G office.

The Refuge Black Bear Baiting Permit does not allow taking bears over bait in numbers, times, places, or by methods not authorized by State of Alaska Hunting Regulations. The bear baiting season on the Refuge begins May 1st and ends on June 15th. For areas in Game Management Unit 15 outside the Refuge boundaries, the black bear baiting season starts April 15th and ends June 15th.

One of the reasons for the difference in season length between the Refuge and the State regulations is that in the past when the Refuge allowed black bear baiting to begin on April 15th, some hunters used snowmobiles to bring in their bait stations. These hunters often brought in too much gear or went in too far to set up their bait stations, and were not able to haul all the equipment out at the end of the baiting season, since ATV's are not allowed at any time on the Refuge. Furthermore, the harvest report data indicated no black bears were taken over bait on the Refuge before May 1st; the data also showed that the highest harvest occurred May 10 through May 25.

It is important to note that black bear baiting is not allowed within one-quarter mile of publicly maintained roads, trails and the Swanson River within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Black bear baiting also is not allowed within one mile of a house, or other dwelling including seasonally occupied cabins, a developed recreational facility or campground.

Only biodegradable materials may be used for bait. The parts of game that may be legally used as bait are heads, bones, guts, skin, or other parts of legally taken game not required to be salvaged. On the Kenai Peninsula fish or fish parts may not be used as bait. Most black bear baiters on the Refuge use dog food mixed with syrup, pastries, and scents.

Bait stations must be clearly marked with a warning sign, on which must be marked the permittee's Alaska Hunting License Number and the hunting license of any one else hunting over the bait station, Alaska Bait Station Registration Number, and the Kenai NWR Bear Baiting Permit Number. This sign must be within 20 feet of the bait station and between 6 and 10 feet above ground level. We also recommend that the bear baiter put up several signs posting the

area as a bait station to avoid anybody inadvertently walking into an active bait station. It's also common for the bears coming into the bait station to tear down or eat the signs.

All materials and equipment including stands, bait and bait containers, contaminated soils from grease or other baits, and signs must be removed by the June 15 end of the black bear baiting season. And finally a black bear baiting Harvest Report Form must be completed and returned by July 15 of the year of the permit is issued. This needs to be done whether the permittee baited or not. Failure to report in a timely manner will result in the permittee not being eligible for a permit the next year.

Other regulations associated with black bear baiting on the Refuge. The use of nails, wire, screws or bolts to attach a stand to a tree, or hunting from a tree into which a metal object has been driven to support a hunter is prohibited. The Refuge recommends hunters use portable tree stands. Also the cutting of green trees is prohibited.

Chris Johnson is the Supervisory Law Enforcement Officer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and has been an Officer at the Refuge for 18 years. He lives in Sterling with his wife Pam and three kids Chelsye, Tyler and Torrey. Previous Refuge Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.